

# Farm to School

## Overview

The term “Farm to School” encompasses efforts that bring local or regionally produced foods into school cafeterias. Hands-on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes can also be a part of the Farm to School program. These activities can be integrated into regular, standards-based classroom curriculum.

The 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) specifically tasked the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with helping “improve access to local foods” for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP). Several grants are available, through USDA and other local organizations that can support Farm to School activities in schools. The USDA completed a Farm to School Census, looking at activities that occurred in the 2011-2012 school year. Among other important data, the census revealed that over 4,000 school districts, over 40,000 schools, and over 23,000,000 children were involved in Farm to School activities across the United States.

## Terminology

**Geographic preference** – The allowance granted by the USDA to a school food authority that gives preference for local products when procuring food items to use in school meals. Geographic preference may be applied to unprocessed and minimally processed items only. It is not a specification.

**Local** - What constitutes a “local” product is defined by the school or district. Definitions will vary depending on the geography of the school’s area and the availability of nearby food producers.

**Procurement** – Refers to the purchasing of goods and services in school nutrition programs.

**Unprocessed** – Refers to foods that are eligible to be purchased using geographic preference.

Unprocessed or minimally processed means the food retains its inherent character. It does not include: cooling; refrigerating; freezing; peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; forming ground products into patties without any additives or fillers; drying/dehydration; washing; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons), vacuum packing and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags or combining two or more types of vegetables or fruits in a single package); the addition of ascorbic acid or other preservatives to prevent oxidation of produce; butchering livestock and poultry; cleaning fish; and the pasteurization of milk.

## What is Farm to School?

Farm to School may involve not only bringing local food into the cafeteria, but incorporating enrichment activities to help students understand where their food is coming from. The below information provides basic details on the procurement of local foods and some available education components of Farm to School. Please refer to the numerous resources found under Additional Resources for additional guidance on incorporating Farm to School ideas into a school environment.

### *Menu Planning and Procurement*

The bringing of local foods into the cafeteria starts with menu planning. When incorporating Farm to School ideas, the menu planner must begin looking at local food options during the menu planning process. The menu planner must find out what foods are grown or produced locally, when they are in season, and determine how local items can be incorporated into the menu. They should consider the following when working to integrate local foods:

- Discover what is local on the current menu

- Substitute local ingredients for non-local items
- Serve local products on the salad bar
- Start a “harvest of the month” program
- Develop new recipes
- Consider what local foods will be most popular among students

Once the menu is planned and local foods are incorporated, the school may begin the procurement process. Just as with all procurement done in school nutrition programs, procurement rules apply when implementing Farm to School. Remember, when procuring goods and service for Child Nutrition Programs using Federal funds, there must be full and open competition, responsible and responsive vendors, the Buy American provision must be followed, and State and local regulations must be followed. Formal versus informal procurement processes must also be followed, as indicated. Please refer to the *Guide: Procuring Local foods for Child Nutrition Programs* for more details on proper procurement practices.

Schools may define “local” however they choose and definitions vary widely depending on the unique geography and climate where the school is located, and on the availability of local food producers. Local foods may include fruits, vegetables, beans, grains and flour, meat, poultry, fish, condiments, herbs, eggs, processed products, and dairy. Farm to School may include purchasing items from all types of producers and food businesses including farmers, ranchers, and fishermen, coops and food hubs, food processors, manufacturers, and distributors, USDA Foods and Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program, and even from school gardens.

Schools may encourage the procurement of local food through using specifications that are flexible enough for small local producers. Schools cannot limit competition by using “local” as a specification, but can use specification related to freshness that may be favorable to local producers, such as requiring delivery within 48 hours of harvest.

Schools may also use geographic preference when evaluating bids. Geographic preference enables schools to state preference for local products both in formal and informal procurements, but does not require local purchasing. Geographic preference applies only to unprocessed locally grown or raised products. Unprocessed products are those that retain their inherent character. Fresh tomatoes would be considered unprocessed, tomato sauce would not. Remember, the application of a geographic preference option must leave an appropriate number of qualified firms to compete for the business. As with all procurement, schools should do everything possible to obtain three quotes. Federal regulations do not prescribe the precise way that geographic preference should be applied, or how much preference can be given to local products. The school district must determine how local preference will be evaluated when scoring the bids.

### *Nutrition Education, Activities and Projects*

#### *School Gardens*

A school garden allows educators to incorporate hands-on learning, allowing students to become active participants in the learning process. A school garden may be as small as a few pots or as large as an acre plot in the schoolyard. A garden program can fit the diverse needs and resources of any school. Research shows school gardens can have a positive impact on student’s academic achievements as well as increase students’ consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. Curricular topics ranging from science to language arts to math and health can all be incorporated in a school garden program. The USDA and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare allow schools to serve food in the cafeteria that has been grown in the school garden.

Before starting a school garden there must be permission from school administrators, communication with other school staff members, and a strong team of supporters, ready to work together on the school garden. Please refer to the Idaho State Department of Education website and the *How Our Gardens Grow: Cultivating Nutrition & Learning through Idaho School Gardens* resource to get started.

#### *Idaho Preferred®*

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture has developed the Idaho Preferred® program, which works to identify and promote Idaho food and agriculture products. The blue and gold Idaho Preferred label helps consumers identify a product is locally produced. The Department of Agriculture offers many helpful resources for the Farm to School program including the Incredible Edible Idaho poster series, My Idaho Plate poster, Food of the Month posters, fundraising opportunities utilizing local products, as well as links to many additional helpful resources and local organizations.

#### *Farm to School Lesson Plan Series*

The Idaho State Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Agriculture, designed lesson plans for students to learn about healthy foods grown in Idaho, while addressing standards in grades 3-5 English and Language Arts, Mathematics, and Health. Each lesson plan includes a presentation, lesson plan outline, poster, take home fact sheet, and class assignments. Topics include Apples, Leafy Greens, Peas & Lentils, Beef, and Dairy. The complete lesson plan materials can be downloaded from the Idaho State Department of Education website.

#### *USDA Resources*

USDA has numerous resources to assist schools and community partners with starting and administering a Farm to School program. Some of these resources include a Farm to School Planning Toolkit and a Media Kit. Links to many valuable resources can be found on USDA's Farm to School website.

### **Why is Farm to School Important?**

Farm to School is an excellent way to encourage the offering of healthy, local foods to the millions of school children in the United States. The program also plays a role in creating economic opportunity for America's farmers and ranchers, as schools are investing their food dollars in their local communities. It is believed that the experiences students may have with Farm to School activities, like visiting a farm or tending a school garden, will help the students make healthy food choices down the road. Farm to School is also a tool used in USDA's *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* movement. *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* works to support local and regional food systems, offering tools that can help farmers, ranchers, other businesses, communities, and individuals looking to build or take advantage of local and regional food systems.

Farm to School programs are believed to strengthen children's and communities' knowledge about, and attitudes toward, agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment; increase children's consumption of fruits and vegetables; increase market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers; and support economic development across numerous sectors.

### **Resources**

Additional resources may be available for this topic, many geared specifically for teachers and use in the classroom. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides and helpful links to relevant subject matter.